A

SERMON

Againſt Prophane

Curſing and Swearing;

Being a

Charitable Admonition

To Her MAJESTY's

FLEET.

By *T. ROBINSON*, Rector of *Ousby* in *Cumberland.*

But above all things, my Brethren, ſwear not at all, &c. James V. 12.

LONDON,
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BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE

Ship's Company

Of Her Majesty's SHIP

PANTHER,

Capt. *John Trotter* Commander.

Gentlemen,

THE Many Civilities I have received from you since I became your Chaplain, have so much obliged me, that I cannot make a better Return, than by presenting you with this plain Sermon against Prophane Cursing and Swearing, a Sin so much in Vogue and Practice, that its become almost Epidemical.

The Dedication.

St. Paul, *when he had ſpent ſome Time in Preaching to the fooliſh* Galatians *(as he calls them), was afraid that he had beſtowed upon them Labour in Vain. But I have no ſuch Apprehenſion of Fear upon me, having with Pleaſure, and to my great Satisfaction, ſeen the Fruit of my Labour, the good Succeſs of my Inſtructions among you, and that not only in your ready and chearful coming to the Church, as often as Opportunity would permit; but in your Decent, Orderly and Chriſtian-like Behaviour in the Worſhip of God, as the Rubrick of our Holy Church directs: And in this, I muſt acknowledge my ſelf obliged to the Influence, the good Example as well as Authority, of our Worthy Captain had upon you.*

Gentlemen,

I can almoſt Glory in your being ſo much reclaimed from this abominable

nable Sin of Swearing in your common Diſcourſe, upon every ſlight Occaſion as giddy Paſſion moved, that this Dedication would ſeem Superfluous and Unneceſſary, if it were not that our corrupt Nature is apt to Relapſe, and old Habits to make Head again, and to return upon us ſometimes with greater Violence. Being therefore to leave your Ship, and the Sea, I thought it convenient to leave with you this Sermon, as a viſible Monitor, that may put you in Mind of what you have heard and received from me, That you hold it faſt, and Repent you of your former Guilt. This was the Command of Chriſt to the Church of Sardis, *by* St. John, *in the* 3*d Chapter of the* Revelations; *and therefore I hope, that it may have the greater Impreſſion upon your Minds.*

I am

The Dedication.

I am now to leave the Charge I had over your Souls: But my Prayers to Heaven ſhall not be wanting for you, That God would preſerve you from the Danger of the Sea, and the Violence of the Enemy; and that by his aſſiſting Grace, you may always be prepared for Death; and then you need not fear the Power of France, *nor the Malice of Hell: For the Worſt they can do unto you, is to ſend you ſooner to Heaven.*

Gentlemen,

I am your Affectionate Miniſter,

and Humble Servant,

Tho. Robinſon.

A SERMON AGAINST Prophane Curſing and Swearing.

JAMES V. 12.

But above all things, my Brethren, ſwear not, neither by Heaven, neither by the Earth, neither by any other Oath: But let your yea, be yea, and your nay, nay; leſt ye fall into Condemnation.

IF we will take the Pains to read over this Epiſtle with Attention, we ſhall find that the Jews, to whom the Apoſtle writ this General Epiſtle, were guilty of ſeveral other Sins of a high Nature, as well as prophane Swearing, which he does not ſlightly take Notice of with a ſuperficial Re-

gard, but ſharply and ſeverely Reproves, as being notorious and ſcandalous to their Holy Profeſſion, the Chriſtian Religion.

In the Firſt Chapter, we find them guilty of over-valuing themſelves upon the external Profeſſion of Chriſtianity; as if the Name of a Religion, without Practice conformable to the Precepts and Doctrines of it, was ſufficient to ſave their Souls. He therefore adviſed them, *Chap.* 1. *v.* 22. That they *ſhould be Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only*, leſt they *put a Cheat upon themſelves; for it is not the Hearers of the Law, but the Doers of it that* are *juſtified.* And our Lord tells us, That *it is not every one that ſaith, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the Will of his Father which is in Heaven.* And, *if you would enter into Life, you muſt keep the Commandments.*

The Jews were naturally a proud and imperious People, apt to ſtroak themſelves on the Head, as if (by being *Abraham's Children*) they had a better Right and Title to God's Favour, than the reſt of Mankind, which they generally look'd upon with an Eye of Scorn and Contempt, giving them moſt opprobrious Names and Characters; which gave the *Apoſtle* Occaſion to tell them, That *if any Man ſeemed to be religious, and bridled not his Tongue, he deceived his own Heart, and his Religion was in vain*, and to no Purpoſe, *Chap.* 1. *v.* 26. They

They were ſo abominably guilty of the Evils of the Tongue, eſpecially of a maſterly Judging and Condemning others, that they put the Apoſtle to the Expence of writing a whole Chapter, in deſcribing and diſwading from the Evils of that ungovernable little Member, the Tongue, which *boaſteth great Matters*: He very fitly repreſents it by Fire; for as a ſmall Spark of that angry Element may ſet on fire the whole Houſe, and one Houſe the whole City; *ſo the Tongue is a Fire, a World of Iniquity, it defileth the whole Body, and ſetteth on fire the whole Courſe of Nature, and is ſet on fire of Hell*, Chap. 3. v. 5, 6. Chap. 3. ver. 1, 2.

They were alſo not only guilty of baſe Covetouſneſs, but of hoarding up their Riches in their Coffers; not communicating of their Subſtance to the Relief of the Poor and Needy; againſt which the Apoſtle pronounceth a moſt bitter Judgment, *Chap.* 5. *v.* 1, 2. *Go to now, ye rich Men, weep and howl for the Miſeries that are coming upon you; your Riches are corrupted, your Garments Moth-eaten; your Gold and Silver is cankered, and the Ruſt thereof ſhall be Witneſs againſt you, and ſhall eat your Fleſh as if it were Fire; you have heaped up Treaſure for the laſt Day.*

Theſe were all great and crying Sins; yet notwithſtanding he adviſeth, That *above all Things, they ſhould* not ſwear: *My Brethren, ſwear not.* Every Word in this Text

is Emphatical: Firſt, the Manner of the Apoſtle's Addreſs, *My Brethren*; ſuch was the Love among Chriſtians in thoſe early Times of the Goſpel's Promulgation, that they generally treated one another in the endearing Terms of *Brother* and *Siſter*, inſomuch that the Heathens made it an Obſervation, *Ecce ut Chriſtiani mutuo ſe amant*; ſee how the Chriſtians love one another. But now (it would make a Man bluſh to ſpeak it) the quite contrary is become a Proverb and By-word, *Ecce ut Chriſtiani mutuo ſe odiunt*; ſee how the Chriſtians hate one another: And is not this too apparent, when at this Time all the Heathen World is at Peace, and almoſt all Chriſtendom involved in Blood and Wounds, having ſuffered under the dreadful Effects of a laſting War?

My Brethren, This familiar and endearing Way of Treatment was uſual to the Apoſtles in their perſwaſive Addreſſes; but more eſpecially to the *Author of this Epiſtle*, and here more emphatically, *But above all Things, my Brethren*; thereby ſignifying his earneſt Deſire that they would give Attention to his Admonition.

See Iſa. viii. 21, 22.

His Addreſs ſeems, by the foregoing Verſe, to be made more particularly to ſuch of the Jews as were at that Time under Want and Poverty, Troubles and Afflictions, that they would bear their Afflictions with Chriſtian

ſtian Patience; ſuppreſſing all Heats and Paſſions, ſuch rebellious Inſurrections and Swellings of the Mind, which too frequently break out in Curſing and Swearing, in profane Oaths and Imprecations, like *Iſrael*, of whom the Prophet complained, That when they were hungry, they fretted, and in a frantick Mood looked upwards and downwards, and curſed God and their King, *Iſa.* 8. 21, 22. It was therefore our Apoſtle's Advice, That with Patience they ſhould keep their Tongues under Government, and eſpecially abſtain from raſh and paſſionate Swearing.

By theſe Words, *ſwear not*, it is not the *Apoſtle*'s Intention, neither was it intended by our *Lord* in his Sermon upon the Mount, univerſally to interdict Swearing upon a lawful and neceſſary Occaſion; but that common Swearing, which was then (and is at this Day) ſo much in Faſhion, almoſt among all Sorts and Degrees of People, that invoking of God's Name, that appealing to his Teſtimony, and provoking his Judgment upon any ſlight Occaſion in common Tattle, with vain Incogitancy, or prophane Boldneſs; from ſuch Practice the *Apoſtle* dehorteth in Terms importing his great Concernedneſs, πρὸ πάντων, above all Things, *my Brethren, ſwear not.*

I ſhall, in the Improvement of this Scripture, Firſt, deſcribe the Nature of an Oath, that Men may know what they do when they ſwear.

2. I ſhall not only make it evident, that an Oath is lawful, but ſhew in what Reſpects it is not only uſeful, but neceſſary.

3. I will ſhew the great Evil of Perjury, and the dangerous Conſequences and Effects of it.

4. I ſhall ſhew the Sinfulneſs of Swearing by the Creatures, or of taking *God's Holy Name in vain*, either directly or indirectly.

5. I ſhall lay open the Nature of *Curſing*, *Imprecation* and *raſh Vows*, the evil and dangerous Conſequences of them.

6. We will inquire in what Caſes *Oaths* and *Vows* may be broken.

7. And, in the laſt Place, ſhall diſſwade from all Swearing in common Diſcourſe and Converſation, by ſhewing, not only the Sinfulneſs of it, but the Folly and Vanity of ſuch a Practice.

The firſt Thing I have propoſed, is to deſcribe the Nature of an Oath, that a Man may know what he does, when he adventures to ſwear.

And this is expreſſed in the Third Commandment in the Decalogue, which Command is Negative, and prohibits the taking of

of *God's Holy Name in vain*; and that upon a ſevere Penalty, *He will not hold him guiltleſs that taketh his Name in vain.*

1. An *Oath* then is the aſſuming of God's Name, and applying it to our Purpoſe, to countenance and confirm what we ſay.

2. It is an Invocation of God, as a faithful Witneſs, to atteſt that we ſwear the *Truth, the whole Truth, and no more than the Truth,* according to that Form uſed in our Courts of Judicature.

3. It is an Appeal to God, as a moſt righteous Judge, that we do not prevaricate, by making Uſe of any Equivocation, or mental Reſervation.

4. It is a Binding our ſelves to anſwer at the Great Day of Judgment, and to receive a Reward or Puniſhment, according to the Truth or Falſhood of what we ſwear.

5. An *Oath* being an Act of Religious Worſhip, that we may perform it with more Solemnity, *the Law requires,* That we lay our Hand upon the Bible, thereby owning that *Sacred Book,* as containing the Charter and Covenant of our Eternal Salvation; and to ſhew our Reverence to that holy *Volume,* wherein the lively Oracles of God are contained, we are obliged to kiſs the Book, and deſire that God would help us at the Day of judging the Secrets of all Men, according

to

to the Tenure of that *Law* and *Covenant*, expreſſed in that Book, between God and Man.

An *Oath* is either *Aſſertory*, or *Promiſſory*, (*i.e.*) In an *Oath* we either aſſert and affirm the Truth of what is paſt, or what is preſent; or we promiſe to ſay or do, or not to ſay or do ſuch a Thing: The former is commonly made uſe of in Courts of Judicature, the latter in Commerce and Contracts.

In every *Oath*, a Man hath to deal with Two Parties, *God* and *Man*: With *God*, as the Searcher of Hearts, and the Grand Witneſs of our Truth and Sincerity; and with *Man*, for whoſe Satisfaction in the Matter the *Oath* is taken; which ſhews the Difference between an *Oath* and a *Vow*. In a formal *Vow*, a Man addreſſes himſelf directly to *God*, and *God* and he are the only Parties concerned: But in an *Oath*, *Man* as well as God is made a Party, tho' the Obligation be the ſame in both.

Having now ſo plainly deſcribed the Nature of an *Oath*, that a Man may know what he does, when he ventures to ſwear; I proceed to the Second Thing propoſed in Method, which is to ſhew,

2. That an *Oath* is not only lawful, but in ſeveral Reſpects uſeful and neceſſary.

That

That an *Oath* is lawful in its own Nature, is evident from hence, that God himſelf hath uſed it upon Occaſion; *by my ſelf have I ſworn, ſaith the Lord*, Gen. 22. 16. So *I ſware in my Wrath that they ſhould not enter into my reſt*, Pſal. 95. 11. The ſame likewiſe was practiſed by an Angel of God, *Dan.* 12. 7. *Who lift up his Hands to Heaven, and ſware by him that liveth for ever and ever.*

Again, as an *Oath* is lawful, ſo in ſeveral Caſes it is expedient and neceſſary, eſpecially if we conſider, that an *Oath* is the beſt Evidence we can have in doubtful Matters, when other Evidence fails. Again, its (as we have obſerved) an Act of Religious Worſhip, for thereby we do not only acknowledge the *Being* of a *God*, but thoſe his Eſſential Attributes of his *Omnipreſence*, *Omniſcience*, *Juſtice* and *Almighty Power*.

To this we may add, the univerſal Conſent of all Nations; wherein Men by the Light of Nature, in doubtful Caſes, have always made Uſe of an Oath, as being a Sacred Obligation of Conſcience. To this Univerſal Cuſtom, the Apoſtle alludes, *Heb.* 6. 16. *For Men verily ſwear by the greater; and an Oath for Confirmation is to them an End of all Strife.*

That the Uſe of an Oath was lawful to the *Jews*, none can deny, being that *Abraham*, *Iſaac* and *Jacob* uſed it. And *Moſes*, by the Command of God, orders, That *if a Controverſy did ariſe, an Oath ſhould decide it*, Exod. 22. 11. Beſides, it was expreſly commanded to the *Iſraelites*, *Thou ſhalt fear the Lord thy God, and ſhall ſwear by his Name.*

Now the great Difficulty will be, to know whether it be lawful to us Chriſtians, or not; for it is not only ſaid by our Lord, *ſwear not at all*, but the Primitive Chriſtians were very cautious how they ventured upon an *Oath*: For they did not only avoid all common and vain Oaths, ſo much in Practice in the World; but they had a great Reluctancy to Swearing, upon the moſt neceſſary and ſolemn Occaſions, as believing that a Chriſtian ought to be believed upon his bare Word and Affirmation. And of late, we have a Sect of People ſprung up among us; (but whether they be Chriſtians or not, I will not here determine,) they having a mighty Conceit of their own Integrity, would willingly have perſwaded all Men to have the ſame Opinion of them: But this Pious Fraud is now diſcovered, and that their *Yea*, and *Nay*, was only a Cloak to cover their Deſign, to get Money by the Cheat; by which they increaſed their Subſtance, and their Party to a conſiderable Number.

But

But the Corruption of Manners having ſo much overſpread the World, that an *Oath* is now become neceſſary for the Maintaining of *Juſtice* and *Equity*, and the Good of Mankind; neither can Humane Societies be ſupported, without an Oath of Fidelity and Obedience to lawful Authority. And certain it is, that St. *Paul*, who knew the Mind of Chriſt, did ſometimes make Uſe of theſe Religious Aſſeverations, to juſtify the Truth and Sincerity of his Actions; as, *I call God for a Record upon my Soul*; and at other Times, *God is my Witneſs*, and *behold before God I lye not*: Which Expreſſions are ſolemn Appeals to God, and do virtually contain in them the Nature of an Oath; and therefore we ſhall conclude, That an Oath is ſometimes neceſſary for Chriſtians, as well as for others of different Perſwaſions. I ſhall proceed to the Third Head,

3. Which will ſet forth the heinous Sin of *Perjury*, and the ſad and dreadful Conſequences of it. And Firſt, to be guilty of *Perjury*, and forſwearing a Man's Self, is the higheſt Degree of Diſhoneſty and Perfidiouſneſs, not only to Man, but to God; For he that ſweareth falſly, and does not *perform his Oaths to the Lord*, does not only deceive Man, but does as much as he can to cheat God.

He that ſwears a Lye, muſt either believe that God knows it not, or that he is pleaſed with it: By the former, he denies God's *Omnipreſence* and *Omniſcience*, and ſo makes him no God; by the latter, he makes him a *Devil*, who was *a Lyar from the beginning*, and pleas'd with a Lye. And thus every perjur'd Man is either an Atheiſt, or makes a near approach to it: For *Perjury* is a Sin that a Man cannot poſſibly be guilty of, till he has ſtupified his Conſcience, and be perſwaded in his *Heart*, *that there is no God.*

Again, *Perjury* is a moſt crying and clamorous Sin, and brings a Curſe upon the Perjured Man and his Family, and that very commonly in this Life, of which the Scripture and Hiſtory gives us ſeveral Inſtances: For God is bound to vindicate the Honour of his Holy Name, from the Abuſes that ſuch prophane Wretches put upon it, by taking of it in vain in countenancing of a Lye. Hence no Wonder if *the flying Roll*, a quick and inavoidable Curſe, come upon them, *Zec.* 5. 2. *And that for Swearing the Land mourneth*, Jer. 23. 10.

Beſides the Conſequences of *Perjury*, if we conſider them with reſpect to the *Publick* as well as *Private Men*, are moſt ſad and dreadful.

For

For no King can be ſecure in his Government, nor any *Common-Wealth* can be eſtabliſhed, without the Sacred Obligation of an Oath; which if Subjects do not make Conſcience of, his Authority and Government is at the Mercy of ſuch Wretches, if they have but Number and Strength to make Diſturbances; of which, this Nation had the ſad Experience in the late Rebellion.

Again, every Man, his Eſtate, his Reputation, nay his very Life, is at the Mercy of of ſuch a one, as makes no Conſcience of Swearing falſly: A Man may better ſecure himſelf from Thieves, Robbers and Murtherers, than from a perjured Villain. *Perjury* is like the Plague that flies abroad, and kills in the Dark; and if Theft and Robbery be Capital Crimes, much more is *Perjury* deſerving of the ſevereſt Puniſhment the Law can inflict.

Having now deſcribed the Nature of an Oath, ſhewn the Lawfulneſs of it in ſeveral Reſpects, and wherein the horrid Sin of *Perjury* conſiſts; I proceed to conſider the Sinfulneſs of Swearing by the Creatures, and of taking God's Holy Name in vain, either directly or indirectly. And it was this our Lord intended by his Prohibition, *Swear not at all, neither by Heaven, for its God's Throne, &c.* And what St. *James* ſo earneſtly dehorts

dehorts from in the Words of my Text: And this will be the Subject of the Fourth Head propoſed.

4. Our Lord tells us, that he came not to *deſtroy the Law, but to fulfil it*; he came indeed to deſtroy thoſe falſe Gloſſes, which the *Phariſees* had put upon the *Moral Law*, but not the Subſtance of it, as appears by his Divine Sermon on the Mount.

The *Phariſees* had a mighty Veneration for the Name of God; and therefore, that it might not be diſſacrated and prophaned by unhallowed Breath, gave Incouragement to the People, (being much addicted to ſwearing) to ſwear in their common Diſcourſe by the Creatures, as by Heaven or Earth, and the like, to prevent their taking of the Name of God in *vain*; which being the ſame Sin a little altered, our Lord interdicts it, and gives his Reaſon for it: For to ſwear by the Creatures, is the ſame as if we ſwore by God the Creator of the World, and all the Creatures in it; nay more, in ſome Reſpects it ſeems to be a greater Sin to ſwear by the Creatures, than by the Name of God; for Swearing being an Act of Religious Worſhip, it gives that Divine Honour and Worſhip to the Creature, which is only due to the Creator, and therefore it is an Idolatrous Swearing, and leſs par-

pardonable

pardonable than ſwearing by the *Name of God*, as appears by what we read in the 5th Chapter of *Jerem.* v. 7. *How ſhall I pardon thee for this? Thy Children have forſaken me, and ſworn by them that are no Gods*: But tho' this was the Effect of their Ignorance, being encouraged to the Practice of it by the *Phariſees*, thoſe great Maſters and Pretenders to Religion; yet our Apoſtle dehorts from it in Words importing his great Earneſtneſs, *Above all Things, my Brethren, ſwear not, neither by Heaven nor by Earth, nor by any other Oath*; (*i. e.*) In your common Diſcourſe and Converſation, which is all that the Apoſtle means by this Dehortation. But we are now grown bolder with God, and venture at every Turn to ſwear by God's *Holy Name*; the Sinfulneſs of which Practice will appear, if we will but take the Pains ſeriouſly to conſider what we have ſaid concerning the Nature of an Oath, and what we do when with prophane Boldneſs we take in our Mouths God's Holy Name upon every ſlight Occaſion, and ſo making our ſelves bold and ſaucy with God, in taking of *his Name in vain.*

Let me therefore deſire of you, *my Brethren*, that *above all Things* you would ſeriouſly conſider what a Preſumption you are guilty of, when without Conſideration, you with an-hallowed Breath rend and toſs that great

and

and glorious, that moſt holy and excellent, that fearful and terrible Name of the Lord our God, the great Creator, the mighty Sovereign, the dreadful Judge of the World; that Name, which all Heaven with profound Submiſſion doth adore; that Name, which the Angelick Powers, the brighteſt Seraphims, without hiding their Faces, cannot utter, *Iſa.* 6. 2. The very Thoughts whereof ſhould ſtrike Awe into our Hearts, the Mention whereof would make a ſober Man tremble.

My Brethren, Conſider how grievous an Undecency it is, to ſummon our Creator at every Turn to ſecond our giddy Paſſions, to decide our childiſh Controverſies, to revenge our fooliſh Quarrels: Let me further deſire you to conſider, what a Wildneſs it is to dally and trifle with that Judgment, upon which the Eternal Doom of all Creatures depend, at which the Pillars of the Earth are aſtoniſhed; *My Fleſh* (ſaith Holy *David*) *trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy Judgments.*

Conſider but this once more how prodigious a Madneſs it is, without any Reſtraint, to ruſh upon a Curſe, and to defy that Vengeance; the leaſt Touch or Breath whereof, can daſh us to nothing. O that we would but a little conſider then, what it is *to take God's Holy Name in vain!*

Incredible

Incredible are the Miſchiefs that this Sin of raſh and prophane Swearing brings upon a Man; for when Oaths become cheap, a Man will ſell them for a ſmall Price; or lend an *Oath* ſometimes to ſerve and oblige a Friend. Again, it leads to Perjury; for when Men ſwear as blind Paſſion leadeth, wanton Phancy prompteth, or the Promptor ſuggeſteth, it is a great Hazard but he ſwears a Lye; which, tho' the Swearer may look ſlightly upon as a Peccadillo, or no Sin at all, yet in the Eye of God it is a Sin of a damnable Nature. But beſides this Sin of *Raſh* and *Prophane Swearing*, I cannot forbear to take Notice of another Sin which is much of the ſame Nature with raſh and inconſiderate Swearing; a Sin that is ſo much in Vogue and Faſhion among Men, that the frequent Repetition of it has made it habitual, and Cuſtom hath taken away both the Senſe of the Sin, and the Guilt of it: And this is raſh and paſſionate Curſing and Imprecation, as well as raſh and inconſiderate Vows; which brings me to the Fifth Head.

5. By Curſing and Imprecation, is meant the ſame Thing; the one being expreſſed by *Male diſcere*, and the other by *Imprecare* or *Male precare*; and theſe Curſes and Imprecations are ſo abominably ſinful in their own Nature, and of ſuch dangerous

Conſequence, that the very repeating of them would make a Man's Blood to riſe in his Face, and make him ſay with *David*, *My Fleſh trembleth for fear of God, and I am afraid of his Judgments.* For how frequently do we hear Men ſometimes, in their exorbitant Heats and Paſſions, praying that God would *Damn them, Body and Soul*; which, if God ſhould take them at their Word, in what a miſerable Condition would they be when ſent to Hell at their own Requeſt!

And how commonly do we hear Men in Paſſion *damn their Neighbour*, and pray to to the *Devil to take him.* Now if the *Devil* ſhould be as ready to Take, as they are to Give, Hell would not contain the Number of Souls that are daily ſent to him. Now conſider, *my Brethren*, how inconſiſtent ſuch paſſionate Curſing is to the Doctrine and Precepts of that Holy Religion theſe Men make Profeſſion of, which obligeth them to love their Neighbour as their own Souls, and to exhort their Neighbour *daily, whilſt it's called to day, leſt they be hardned by the Deceitfulneſs of Sin.* This is a Practice ſo abominably impious, that a Turk or Heathen would bluſh to be guilty of it: And therefore, *above all Things, my Brethren*, break it off by ſpeedy Repentance, leſt Fire and Brimſtone overtake you, and there be none to deliver you.

But beſides this Sin of Curſing and Imprecation, there is another Sin much a kin to it, and that is Raſh and Inconſiderate *Vows* and *Oaths*; which bind a Man to unlawful Practices; as *Saul* and *Herod*, and thoſe Jews that entered into a ſolemn Oath, That they would kill *Paul*, Acts 23. 21.

Such raſh and unpremeditated *Vows* and *Oaths* often bind a Man to do Things detrimental to himſelf: *That which is gone out of thy Lips, thou ſhalt keep and perform, even the Vows thou haſt made to the Lord*, Deut. 23. 23. *When thou voweſt a Vow to the Lord, defer not to pay it; for the Lord is not pleaſed with the Sacrifice of Fools*, Eccleſ. 5. 3.

Now as to the Queſtion, Whether theſe raſh *Vows* and *Oaths* may in no Caſe be broken? Which was the Sixth Head I propoſed to ſpeak to.

6. I anſwer; That when a Man makes *Vows* and *Oaths* raſhly, without Premeditation, to do a Thing unlawful, as thoſe Jews, *Acts* 23. 12. who bound themſelves under a great Curſe, That they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed *Paul* Without doubt, he that obligeth himſelf by a *Vow* or an *Oath* to do a ſinful Thing, commits a great Sin againſt God; but if he ſhould perform it, it would be a greater Sin; and of Two Evils, the Greater is to be avoided

2. It is poſſible that a Man may ſwear inconſiderately to perform that which is impoſſible, and not in his Power to perform. Now all Caſuiſts agree in this, That there is no obliging of a Man to Impoſſibilities.

3. A Perſon that ſwears when he is under the Power of a Superior, without whoſe Conſent he ſhould not have ſworn; in which Caſe, if the Superior will not allow of it, that *Oath* is not to be kept; for ſo the Caſe is determined, *Numb.* 30. 3. where God gives a Father or Husband Power to make void the Obligation under which the Wife or Daughter hath brought themſelves by an *Oath* or a *Vow*.

4. The Poſture of Affairs, or the Circumſtances of the Perſon to whom he ſware, may be ſo different from what they were when the *Oath* was made, that it ought not to be performed. As if a Father ſhould ſwear to ſettle all his Eſtate upon his Son, if afterward that Son ſhould attempt to take away his Life, the Father is freed from his *Oath*; becauſe when he made the *Oath*, he was a dutiful Son to him, but afterwards became a Child of Satan.

5. In

5. In all Promiſſory *Oaths* there are certain general Conditions to be obſerved, tho' they were not expreſſed; ſuch as, *if God permit, if the Lord will, or if we live and do well*: Now in ſuch a Caſe, if a Man had no Intention to break his *Oath*, but being hindred by meer Providence, he cannot be ſaid to break his *Oath*.

6. Where an *Oath* is founded upon ſome particular *Privilege* or *Prerogative*, if that Privilege doth ceaſe, then the Obligation of an *Oath* to that Perſon taken under that Notion, doth alſo ceaſe to oblige. As, ſuppoſe a Man ſhould ſwear to a King or Governour to be aſſiſtant and faithful to him; yet if that King or Supreme Governour ſhould relinquiſh his Office and run away from it, the Obligation of the Oath of Fidelity ceaſeth. Thus in all Conqueſts, an *Oath* of Fidelity to the preceding Governour ceaſeth to oblige, eſpecially if we reſolve to ſtay under the Power of the Conqueror, who by that Conqueſt gets a Right to the Duty of that *Oath* taken to the preceding Governour.

Having now ſhewn in what particular Caſes and Circumſtances a *Raſh Vow*, or an unpremeditated *Oath* may be broken, and what *Oaths* are better broken than kept, and likewiſe how by *Abdication* or *Conqueſt* a Subject

ject is freed from his *Oath* of Fidelity: I come to the laſt Thing propoſed, which was, to diſſwade from this ſinful Practice of prophane Swearing in common Diſcourſe and Converſation, by ſhewing the Folly and Vanity of it. And firſt, let us conſider, that

1. Swearing in common Diſcourſe, is a Breach of the Third Commandment, which obligeth us not to take God's Name in vain, under Pain of his Diſpleaſure, having plainly declared in that Command, That he will not hold ſuch guiltleſs, as by common and prophane Swearing takes his Name in vain.

2. Conſider, That if we profeſs our ſelves to be of the Number of Chriſt's Diſciples, and own the Bleſſed Jeſus to be our Lord and Maſter, we are obliged by our Profeſſion to obey the Command of our Maſter, who hath prohibited all prophane Swearing, either by the Name of God, or any of his Creatures; and has ordered, That in our Communication, our *Yea* ſhould be *Yea*, and our *Nay* ſhould be *Nay*; *i. e.* That we ſhould be Men of ſuch profeſſed Integrity of Life, as to be always Men of our Word; and then all Swearing would be vain and ſuperfluous, as coming of Evil; or ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ, from the evil One, the *Devil*.

3. Con-

3. Conſider, That by common Swearing, we extremely leſſen our own Reputation and Character, Swearing being an evident Symptom of a Lyar: For a Man that hath practiſed Lying, Diſſimulation, Wheedling or Equivocating, diſtruſting his own Credit, is forced to ſupport his Reputation with Oaths, Curſes and Execrations; and when Men do thus diſtruſt their own Credits, they muſt certainly give others Occaſion to do it.

4. Conſider that common Swearing hath no ſtrong Temptation to the Guilt of it; the Covetous Man gets Riches, the Carnal Man and Voluptuarian gets Pleaſure, the Ambitious Man gets Honour; but the Common Swearer ſells his Soul for nothing.

5. Conſider that the Common Swearer gives Diſturbance to all good Company, there being neither Harmony nor Concord in that Diſcourſe that is plumpt with fulſome *Oaths* and *Curſes*: Such Men are only fit Companions for *Rakes*, *Buffoons* and *Debauchees* of the Town; for as they are odious to God, ſo are they to all good Men.

In the laſt Place, we will inquire from what Helliſh *Vulcano* thoſe fiery Meteors of Curſing and Swearing do ariſe, that, as St. *James*

St. *James* the *Author* of this Epiſtle expreſſes it, *ſet on Fire the whole Courſe of Nature.*

And, 1. We may obſerve, that ſometimes they ariſe from exorbitant Heats and Tranſports of Paſſion, which ſeem to be natural to ſome Men of a hot, fiery, cholerick Conſtitution, which having a juſt Provocation of Anger given them, do leſſen the Guilt, provided they ſuffer not the Sun to go down on their Wrath, and ſo give Place to the Devil to inflame their Anger into Thoughts of Revenge. Thus as the Apoſtle expreſſeth it, a Man may *be angry and ſin not*, Anger being a Paſſion as natural to the Soul, as the Flux and Reflux to the Sea; yet it's the grand Duty of every Man, eſpecially of a Chriſtian, to ſubdue thoſe Natural Paſſions and Fluctuations of the Spirit, that they do not overflow the Banks of Reaſon, and Bounds of Religion.

2. *Sometimes* they ariſe from Pride and a fond Conceitedneſs of Opinion, which rather than ſome Men will part with or be oppoſed in, break out into ſtrange Hurricanes of bloody and unheard-of Oaths and Imprecations.

3. Sometimes vain Swearing ariſes from Wantonneſs and Levity of Mind, ſwearing as it were in Jeſt, making Sport with God's Sacred

Sacred Ordinances, and making no other Uſe of his Holy Name than vainly to ſwear by.

4. *Sometimes* alſo from a ſtupid Inadvertency, when Men have ſo accuſtomed themſelves to Swearing, that they know not when they do ſo. It's ſaid, that every wiſe Man hath his Tongue in his Heart; that is, he thinks before he ſpeaks; but every Fool hath his Heart in his Tongue, ſpeaking always what is uppermoſt, and ſeldom with Conſideration.

5. *Sometimes* alſo Swearing ariſeth from an Apiſh Imitation: And theſe Men think Swearing to be the only Badge of Gentility, and the diſtinguiſhing Character of a free and generous Education, exalting them above thoſe poor Animals and mean Souls, that dare not rap out an Oath to garniſh their Diſcourſe with.

Thus common and prophane Swearing being ſo much in Faſhion in this wicked and degenerate Age we live in; againſt which impious and abominable Practice, I cannot make Uſe of a more powerful and diſſwaſive Argument, than the Words of the Apoſtle: *But above all things, my Brethren, ſwear not, neither by Heaven, nor by the Earth, nor by*

any other Oath; but let your Yea be Yea, and your Nay be Nay, leſt you fall into Condemnation.

That this Apoſtolick Admonition may make the deeper Impreſſion upon your Minds, let me adviſe you to have always a lively Senſe of God's Omnipreſence and conſtant Inſpection over you; for he ſees all your Actions, hears all your Words and ſinful Expreſſions: And if (as our Lord tells us) that at the Day of Judgment we muſt be accountable for every *idle Word we ſpeak*; certainly much more muſt we be accountable for every idle and vain *Oath* we *ſwear*.

And this cannot ſeem ſtrange to Chriſtians who have read God's own Word, the Holy Scripture. The Prophet *Iſaiah* tells us, *That the Eyes of the Lord are open to behold all the Ways of the Sons of Men:* And in that Place, he further aſſures us, that he is no idle and careleſs Spectator of Humane Actions, *but that he will reward every one according to his Works and the Fruit of his Doings.* Holy *Job* tells us, *That his Eyes are upon the Ways of Man, and that he ſees all his Goings; there is no Darkneſs nor ſhadow of Death, where the Workers of Iniquity may hide themſelves,* Job 34. 21, 22. The Pſalmiſt, in the 139 *Pſalm* (which is a *Pſalm* that ſhould be every Chriſtian's conſtant Meditation) tells us, that *there is not a Word in our Tongue,*

Tongue, but God knows it altogether. And he farther ſays in that *Pſalm*, that there is no avoiding of his Preſence: *Whether ſhall I go from thy Spirit, or whether ſhould I fly from thy Preſence? If I take the Wings of the Morning, and dwell in the utmoſt Parts of the Sea, even there ſhall thy Right Hand lead me.*

Again the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* aſſures us, *that all Things lie open and naked to the Eyes of that God with whom we have to deal*, Heb. 4. 13.

Now the Conſideration of this great Truth, that we are always in the Preſence of a righteous and holy Being, from whoſe perceiving and all-ſeeing Eye nothing can be hid, from whoſe perfect and infinite Knowledge nothing can be concealed; it's ſufficient (one would think) to force us to take heed to all *our Ways*, and more eſpecially, *that we offend not with our Tongue.*

It's an ingenious Obſervation that one made, of God's giving to Man Two Ears and Two Eyes, and but One Tongue; thereby teaching him to hear and ſee twice as much as he ſhould ſpeak. Its obſerv'd alſo, that Nature has barricado'd up this little Member with a double pair of Portculliſes, (*viz.*) the Teeth and Lips, and yet (without God's preventing Grace) it will break through both theſe Guards and Reſtraints.

It's therefore the great Concern of every one, to pray to God to ſet a Watch before the Door of his Lips, and to watch over his Watching.

If Men have generally ſo much Regard for the Preſence of a great Man, that they will not in his Preſence be guilty of ſpeaking any undecent Expreſſions, or commit any rude and unbecoming Action; ſure then we ſhould be much more afraid to affront our great God Almighty to his Face, by taking his holy Name in vain.

Let me, in the laſt Place, deſire of you, that you would be conſtant in Prayer, and that every Morning you would, with good Attention, ſay your Lord's Prayer, *Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy Name*; which would certainly prevent your uttering raſh, paſſionate and inconſiderate Wiſhes to the Devil, that he would either take your Selves or your Neighbours, or by vain Oaths diſſacrate the holy Name of your Great God, and Almighty Creator.

To Conclude then, I adviſe, that every Morning you ſay that Collect in the Liturgy of our holy Church: *Prevent us, O Lord, this Day in all our Doings with thy moſt gracious Favour, and further us in all our*

our Undertakings with thy continual Help; that by a pious and holy Life, we may glorifie thy Holy Name, and finally by thy Mercy obtain everlasting Life, through the Merits and Mediation of Jesus Christ our only Saviour, to whom with God the Father and Holy Spirit, be all Glory, Honour, Might, Majesty and Dominion now and for evermore.

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